

Chapter 4

McMolestation

If there is anyone who can relate to the sentiments expressed by the Presidio and West Point parents, it is the mothers and fathers of the children who attended the infamous McMartin Preschool. The McMartin case was, of course, the largest and most well publicized of the multi-victim, multi-perpetrator ritual abuse cases that captured headlines in the 1980s. It was also a case that was grotesquely misrepresented by the media, both mainstream and ‘alternative’—perhaps nowhere more so than in the appalling writings of *Nation* columnist Alexander Cockburn, who went so far as to write an op-ed piece entitled “The McMartin Case: Indict the Children, Jail the Parents,” which ran in *The Wall Street Journal* on February 8, 1990.

Virtually everyone agrees that the children of McMartin were victimized. There is considerable debate, of course, over whether that victimization was by abusive caretakers, or by overzealous therapists and prosecutors. Either way, Cockburn’s stance on the case was unconscionable and should have sent a clear signal to the progressive community that there was considerably more to the McMartin allegations than met the eye. The harsh reality is that the McMartin Preschool, in conjunction with at least two other Manhattan Beach preschools and one babysitting service, was the center of a very large child prostitution and child pornography ring whose operations appear to have been protected and covered up by any number of local, state and federal officials.

A glimpse of the true nature and scale of the McMartin case is offered by an official correspondence from Sergeant Beth Dickerson of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department to Agent Kenneth Lanning at the FBI Academy’s Behavioral Sciences Unit in Quantico, Virginia, dated February 10, 1985:

In August 1983, the Manhattan Beach Police Department began an investigation regarding allegations of sexual abuse occurring at the McMartin Preschool...Altogether, approximately 400 children were

evaluated by therapists at Children's Institute International. All interviews were videotaped and 350 children disclosed sexual behavior...

In all, the victims named seven teachers (six women and one male) at the preschool as having molested them. These individuals are currently charged with 209 counts of child molestation. Also named are about 30 other individuals still uncharged, as well as numerous unidentified 'strangers.'

McMartin victims allege sexual abuse occurred on school grounds as well as at a local market, churches, a mortuary, various homes, a farm, a doctor's office, other preschools and other unknown locations...

Most children state they were photographed in the nude...They mention drinking a red or pink liquid that made them sleepy...Children disclose animal sacrificing (bunnies, ponies, turtles, etc.) and some of this occurred in churches. Victims describe sticks put in their vaginas and rectums and also being 'pooped' and 'peed' on. Children say that the adults sometimes dressed in black robes, formed a circle around them and chanted.

In May 1984, another preschool investigation began in the same policing jurisdiction stemming from a McMartin victim who identified the Manhattan Ranch Preschool as a place where he was taken and molested...additional children have begun disclosing sexual abuse (approximately 60) and they have named six or more additional suspects...These children talk of strangers coming to the school and molesting them, being taken off campus and molested, being photographed nude and some talk of animals being abused. The children talk of being hit with sticks and of being 'peed' and 'pooped' on...

[T]he resources of the police department and the District Attorney's office were not sufficient in order to follow up on the multitude of uncharged suspects in both preschools...The Task Force became operational on November 5, 1984. It should be noted that the Task Force has two other preschools under investigation for alleged sexual abuse in addition to McMartin and Manhattan Ranch. One, the Learning Game Preschool, is clearly linked to McMartin.

An astounding 460 children reported being sexually abused at the three closely linked Manhattan Beach schools. Even more astounding, investigative author Michael Newton (among others) has noted that Children's Institute International determined "a full eighty percent displayed physical symptoms, including vaginal or rectal scarring, anal bleeding, painful bowel movements, and the 'anal wick reflex' associated with violent penetration." The stories told

by the victim/witnesses were remarkably similar as to the nature of the abuse, the locations where the abuse took place, and the perpetrators of the abuse. And these were not, as is commonly believed, only preschool children telling such stories; some of the witnesses were former students in their teens and twenties, and their stories corroborated those of the children.

The older witnesses were not allowed to testify at the McMartin trials, however, as the statute of limitations for the crimes committed against them had expired. Many of the younger witnesses were unable to offer testimony as well, for various reasons—most notably because they were too severely traumatized. Even so, as author Jan Hollingsworth has pointed out, prosecutors had at their disposal “more than a hundred child witnesses as old as eleven and a truckload of medical reports bearing documentation of scarred genitals and anuses.” The stories told by these children, it should be noted, were not fed to them by some diabolical team of therapists and headline-seeking journalists. Many of them were offered spontaneously to hundreds of parents and scores of childcare specialists. And many of the victims of the McMartin Preschool, all adults now, still tell the same stories today.

Anyone suggesting that the allegations in the McMartin case were true and that a massive cover-up concealed the true nature and scope of the case is likely to be labeled a ‘conspiracy theorist.’ The most preposterous conspiracy theory surrounding McMartin, however, has always been the notion that some cabal of overzealous therapists was able to implant ‘false memories’ of heinous abuse in the minds of nearly 500 individuals, and have them persist to this day.

Despite the vast number of eyewitnesses—most of them bearing physical evidence of abuse—and despite the fact that the judge who presided over more than a year of pre-trial testimony ruled that the state had more than enough evidence to proceed to trial, District Attorney Ira Reiner inexplicably dropped all charges against five of the seven McMartin defendants on January 17, 1986. Six days before that, he had summarily dismissed two prosecutors on the case.

At least three-dozen suspects who had been independently identified by numerous witnesses were never indicted at all. One of these was a man named Robert Winkler, who was arrested in neighboring Torrance, California and charged with running a baby-sitting service out of the Coco Palms Motel that authorities described as a front for a sexual abuse ring. Children in the McMartin case recognized Winkler in news footage as the man they had known as the ‘Wolfman.’ The kids described Winkler as being a frequent visitor to the school, who oftentimes delivered drugs for use in abusive rituals, which were sometimes conducted in churches, a cemetery, or a crematorium. The Wolfman, conveniently enough, turned up dead on the eve of his trial, allegedly of a drug overdose.

Winkler was not the only one to miss his day in court in conjunction with the McMartin case. Judy Johnson, the first McMartin parent to lodge a complaint, never delivered her scheduled testimony. Her body was found sprawled naked on the floor of her home, her death said to be due to complications from her chronic alcoholism. Before her death, she was regularly derided by defense attorneys and their media allies as a deranged crank. In truth, Johnson was not known to have any mental problems, or a drinking problem, before learning of the unthinkable abuse her child had suffered. Considered a key prosecution witness, Johnson received frequent threats before her death and she was followed when she ventured out in public. Many of the other McMartin parents were openly skeptical of Johnson's stated cause of death.

A former Hermosa Beach police officer named Paul Bynum, who had been hired by the parents of victims as a private investigator, turned up dead on the eve of his scheduled testimony as well. His death by gunshot was ruled a suicide, though those close to Bynum dispute that finding. Among other things, Bynum may have testified about his examination of the tunnel excavation project conducted at the school site. This was, of course, the object of much derision by the media. The fact that the children repeatedly told stories of tunnels under the property by which they could be secretly transported to and from the school, and in which they were subjected to horrific abuse in a secret room, was frequently cited as 'proof' that the children's stories were fabrications. It was universally accepted that the tunnels did not actually exist, that being the consensus view of the media and law enforcement authorities. Nevertheless, while it is true that the investigation commissioned by the District Attorney's office found no evidence of tunnels, another investigation, ignored by the media, certainly did.

Many of the parents were not satisfied with the superficial examination by the DA's office and commissioned another investigation of the site when the property was sold in April 1990. To lead the project, they hired E. Gary Stickel, Ph.D., a highly regarded archeologist recommended to them by the Chair of the Interdisciplinary Program of the Archeology Department at UCLA. Stickel's résumé included serving as a consultant to George Lucas on the *Indiana Jones* movies. Also brought on board were several other technical specialists. As Stickel wrote in his report on the excavation, "by engaging a highly recommended professional archeological team, [the parents] hoped to bring scientific authority to whatever might be found or a definitive resolution for whatever was not to be found." And what the team found was precisely what the children, for the previous seven years, had been telling them they would find:

The project unearthed not one but two tunnel complexes as well as previously unrecognized structural features which defied logical explanation. Both tunnel complexes conformed to locations and functional descriptions established by children's reports. One had been described as providing undetected access to an adjacent building on the east. The other provided outside access under the west wall of the building and contained within it an enlarged, cavernous artifact corresponding to children's descriptions of a 'secret room.'

Both the contour signature of the walls and the nature of recovered artifacts indicated that the tunnels had been dug by hand under the concrete slab floor after the construction of the building...Not only did the discovered features fulfill the research prequalifications as tunnels designed for human traffic, there was also no alternative or natural explanation for the presence of such features...

If the stories of the children were bogus fantasies, there is no excuse for the tunnels discovered under the school. If there really were tunnels, there is no excuse for the glib dismissal of any and all of the complaints of the children and their parents.

This investigation was completed *before* the McMartin trials concluded, and yet this devastating evidence was never presented in court by the prosecution team. The existence of this detailed report—complete with photographs and maps of the tunnel complex—was known to the local and national press, but it was never reported. To this day, it is denied that any tunnels ever existed under the McMartin Preschool. The denial of the tunnels is necessary to maintain the illusion that the children were not credible witnesses, that illusion being an essential component of the cover-up. For if the children *were* credible, the implications run far deeper than the tunnels under the school. There are, for example, the stories told by the children of being pimped out as child prostitutes in private homes and businesses all over the community. They also spoke frequently of being photographed and videotaped while being abused. District Attorney Robert Philibosian publicly declared the McMartin Preschool to be an elaborate front for a massive child pornography operation. Twenty-three parents filed a civil lawsuit making the very same claim.

Other stories told repeatedly by the children were even more disturbing. They told of being forced to witness and participate in the ritual torture, killing and mutilation of animals and, on occasion, of human babies and children as well. They spoke of being forced to drink the blood and eat the flesh of the slaughtered corpses, of witnessing the beheading of infants, and of being forced to stab infants themselves. They told as well of being sealed in coffins with the mutilated

corpses. And they spoke of being subjected to every sort of depraved sexual activity imaginable, including necrophilia, coprophilia and bestiality.¹⁵ The abuse was of such stunning brutality that it is almost beyond human comprehension that anyone could inflict such physical and psychological torture on children. And yet these stories were soon being told by thousands of other kids across the country as preschool abuse cases spread like wildfire. Young children from all walks of life, and from all parts of the country, were all telling remarkably similar stories of horrific ritual abuse.

How was this possible? If they were all victims of ‘false memories,’ how vast a conspiracy would be required for therapists all across the country to implant the very same memories in all of these children? Experts have noted that the victimized children show a level of knowledge that defies rational explanation if the kids have not experienced what they claim to have experienced. For instance, these child victims can accurately describe the look, smell, texture and colors of human viscera. This is an ability, it has been argued, that very few adults possess, other than those who have been trained as surgeons or coroners. These children also display a remarkable level of knowledge of a wide variety of unconventional human sexual practices, including many acts that, again, most adults do not have knowledge or awareness of. If these children did not experience these things firsthand, then how *did* they gain such knowledge?

In February 1985, officer Sandi Gallant of the San Francisco Police Department submitted a report to her superiors noting the similarities in numerous ritual abuse cases. She had gathered evidence from fellow officers and police departments across the country and summarized the evidence referenced in the police reports submitted to her. An excerpt from her report reads as follows:

The information contained herein is distasteful and bizarre, to such a degree that one would choose to discredit it. However, research that I have done in this area has revealed that numerous cases of this type are surfacing around the country and in Canada. The similarities in the stories of each child victim used in these crimes tend to give credibility to the information revealed by others. Additionally, the psychiatrists and therapists who have been treating the victims state that the consistency

15 Barron’s *Dictionary of Medical Terms* defines necrophilia as a “morbid liking or desire for dead bodies, esp. the desire to have sexual contact with a dead body.” Bestiality is defined as “sexual involvement of a human with an animal.” Coprophilia is defined by *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* as “an abnormal, often obsessive interest in excrement, especially the use of feces for sexual excitement.”

of the stories and the explicit details revealed cause them to believe that these children are telling the truth. It is also the belief of each law enforcement officer who submitted information for this report that the victims are being truthful and that, in fact, children would be unable to make such stories up.

During my research, similarities began surfacing which indicate the strong probability that there exists a network of people in this country involved in the sexual abuse and possible homicides of young children. These cases appear to differ from isolated cases of abuse towards children in that the crimes mentioned here have been committed with one common goal in mind—that of mutilating and murdering children for ritualistic or sacrificial purposes. Many of the cases reported also reveal the possibility of child pornography beyond the normal type of ‘kiddie porn’ in that these children are photographed during rituals with some members in robes or other garb and candles, snakes, swords, altars and other types of ritualistic material being used.

Gallant requested that the report be sent on to the chief of police for him to review and then forward to the FBI. Following his review, however, the chief declined to submit the report. Gallant next tried to get the U.S. Department of Justice to review the paperwork, but she was rebuffed there as well.

As for the McMartin case, there has never been any question that the children there were horrifically abused. Though rarely noted in press reports, the jurors were clearly of the opinion that that was, in fact, the case. The hung juries and acquittals in the various proceedings were the result of the jury members’ inability to identify the perpetrators of the abuse, not the reflection of any belief that there wasn’t any abuse. The jurors attributed their inability to identify the perpetrators to the inept presentation of the prosecution’s case.

Also rarely noted in the reporting on the trials is that the matriarch of the McMartin family—Virginia McMartin—admitted on the stand that one of her own granddaughters believed that her own children had been molested at the school. Virginia McMartin, incidentally, was more than just your run-of-the-mill preschool operator. In the mid-1960s, she achieved a sort of semi-celebrity status in the childcare field, and traveled extensively as a consultant, including stops in New Zealand, Australia, Denmark, Sweden, Norway and England.

Another notable aspect of the McMartin trials is that the defense team was allowed to subject the child witnesses to the longest pretrial hearing in the nation’s history. Facing a battery of as many as seven rabid defense attorneys, the already severely traumatized children were verbally assaulted for weeks on end in

a deliberate attempt to break them. The state made little effort to protect these young victim/witnesses.

In the final analysis, the logical conclusion to be drawn from the McMartin case is that 460 kids did not all conspire to lie about the abuse they suffered. They also did not likely lie about their involvement in child prostitution and child pornography. They certainly did not lie about the tunnels under the school. They probably did not lie about their forced involvement in satanic rituals, in which adults sheathed in black ceremonial robes uttered chants. In fact, at least one such robe was seized from the home of a defendant. And perhaps most tragically, there is good reason to believe that they did not lie about the blood sacrifices either.